

- At the June 1, 2021 NCES/IGBC Spring Meeting, the November 24, 2020 meeting notes were approved and accepted as recorded.

NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM SUBCOMMITTEE

Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee

Fall Meeting 2020

24 November 2020

9:00am – 12:00pm

Subcommittee

Kristin Bail (USFS, chair)
Jason Ransom for Karen Taylor-Goodrich (NPS)
Wayne Kasworm for Hilary Cooley (USFWS)
Gregg Kurz (USFWS)
Brendan Brokes (WDFW)
Nichole Branton DFS, MBS
Jodie Wiel FS, MBS

Other Participants

Monte Kuk (USFS)
Jack Oelfke (NPS)

Other Presenters

Zoe Hanley (Defenders of Wildlife)

Audience

Chris Morgan – Ecologist, filmmaker
Robb Krehbiel – Defenders of Wildlife, NW Rep.
Graham Taylor – National Parks Conservation Association

Technical Team

John Rohrer (USFS, chair)
Anne Braaten (NPS)
Jesse Plumage (USFS)
Scott Fitkin (WDFW)
Wayne Kasworm (USFWS)

Information and outreach

Lori Roberts

Joe Scott (CNW)
Patrick Lathrop
Steve Taber

Review of Notes from June 2020 meeting

- No comments, accepted as recorded.

Update from North Cascades National Park – Jason Ransom

- Science paper to be published in the peer-reviewed journal, Ursus, next week “Evidence for Grizzly Bears in the North Cascades”
- Jason to be presenting paper soon on North Cascades climate change and potential impacts to NCE grizzly bear habitat.

Update from US Fish & Wildlife Service – IGBC Recovery Wayne Kasworm

- Other recovery zone subcommittees having fall meetings.
- The USFWS is currently undergoing a Five-year review for grizzly bear, this includes a Species Status Assessment. The status of all six ecosystems will be evaluated in the lower 48 states to review the state of recovery efforts and ensure the current listing is still valid. Makes projections on future population status if conservation efforts increase or decrease. Five year review should be completed in March 2021. It will result in a recommendation, if that recommendation includes any changes to present status they could then proceed with a proposed rule process.
- May-be-present mapping effort underway. Has to do with where consultations for Federal actions would occur for grizzly bear. Being driven by court decisions specific to lynx. The “bar” for may-be-present is very low. Draft recommendation close to being submitted to Washington, DC office. No projected date of completion, possible spring of 2021.

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Update from WA Department of Fish & Wildlife - Brendan Brokes

- Personnel updates. Jim Brown, Region 2 director, has retired; Andrew Murdock was in his place, but has stepped down. Due to a reduced budget associated with the COVID pandemic the Region 2 director position has not been filled. Region 1 Director Steve Pozzangerra and Region 3 Director Mike Livingston may be available for assistance, if needed. Brendan will remain the primary subcommittee member and point of contact for WDFW.

Update from Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest - Nicole Branton

- Continuing to work on a forest-wide food storage order for the front country.

Update from Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest - Kristin Bail

- Alliance for Wild Rockies Litigation update – AWR litigating decision on the Mission Restoration project on Methow Valley Ranger District; includes points regarding grizzly bear analysis. Hearing for a stop motion was held November 10th in Spokane. Judge wanted time to review records prior to making ruling.
- Twisp Restoration project draft EA currently out for public review; similar to Mission project but project area larger.
- Effective October 1st, Tonasket Ranger District now being administered by the Colville NF.
- Travel management plan – Was briefly put on hold, now have a team leader designated (Sendi Kalcic) and in place to start reviewing project record and making some progress.

Update from British Columbia – Garth Mowat

Submitted via email after the meeting: *Fieldwork this summer focused on investigating attractants and testing habitat models. A coordinator was hired part-time to present bear education material to staff and guests in Manning Park. BC Parks is continuing to implement the results of the 2018 bear hazard assessment for EC Manning Park. We have an outline for a revised Recovery Plan which will be presented as a revision of the published 2003 Recovery Plan. Tony Hamilton has been hired to write the first draft of the new recovery plan and he will present his draft to the Working Group in late January or February.*

Western Wildlife Outreach Update – Lorna Smith

- Did not join the call today.
- Submitted via email: *You may not know that WWO has been largely in abeyance with no contract work since last year. I took a hiatus to run for Jefferson County Commissioner here. Didn't make it. I would like to phone in to listen in, but really don't have anything new to report. Until our state is able to open back up, we won't be doing a lot of outreach and education! New administration will hopefully change some things for the better. Our trailer is parked for now! Lorna Smith*

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NCE Action Plan – 2020 Accomplishments and 2021 Proposed Actions

Reviewed and edited the draft NCE Action Plan in preparation for submission to IGBC Executive Committee. See the spreadsheet: *5-Year Plan Goals_Objectives_Strategies_with Annual Work Plan Elements Nov24* for details.

Goal #1: Establish and implement clear direction for recovery

- ◆ Restoration EIS process halted in 2020. No planned actions for 2021.

Goal #2 Maintain or enhance habitat conditions for grizzly bears

Objective #1 - Reaffirm forest no-net loss policy.

No net loss of core policy not yet reaffirmed. Planned action for 2021 - The OKW and MBS will review the new Defenders of Wildlife *NCE Grizzly Bear Coexistence and Core Habitat Analysis* report, the USFWS's Species Status Assessment for Grizzly Bears when it is finalized, the USFWS's "may-be-present" mapping effort for grizzly bears when it is finalized, and the results of the litigation on the Mission project. We will consider these documents to help us prioritize and continue efforts to update the technical elements and the data associated with the no net loss of core strategy.

Question: Will this involve the Technical Team? Answer: Technical Team involvement would come after the 2 NFs determine priorities and where the proposed work fits in with other programmed work.

Objective #2: Complete ecosystem-wide bear sanitation database

- ◆ NCNP, OKW, and MBS each have a database. NCNP and OKW have updated annually. MBS was not updated in 2020. All 3 plan to update again in 2021.

Objective #3 – Standardize trailhead sign language by 2022.

IGBC has a standard sign; OKW is using that version to replace old ones. MBS not using these signs, signs often stolen on MBS, often using laminated paper signs that primarily speak to black bears. NCNP not using IGBC sign, having internal discussions about standard Park signage.

Brief discussion about whether or not to keep this objective. Agreed that it was important. OKW, MBS, and NCNP will continue to work toward being consistent and using the standard IGBC trailhead sign. Wayne Kasworm will facilitate getting more of these IGBC signs to anyone that needs them.

Objective #4 – Expand food storage orders to both National Forests by 2022.

- MBS continued to work toward a front country food storage order. OKW plans to get all FS campground waste disposal infrastructure upgraded to bear-resistant prior to pursuing a food storage order.

Objective #5: Increase availability of bear-resistant food storage and waste receptacles annually.

- NCNP, MBS, and OKW all purchased and/or installed additional bear-resistant dumpster and/or food storage lockers. WDFW and OKW worked with Defenders as part of MBA (Methow Bear Aware coalition) on sanitation infrastructure. MBA secured and successfully tested two brands of residential cans during a pilot program. The local waste management company with support from

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MBA began converting its cans to the preferred bear resistant variety and is spearheading an effort to deploy the cans in the Upper Methow Valley.

- A virtual workshop on living and recreating in bear country was hosted by Defenders of Wildlife on September 1, 2020.
- NCNP, MBS, OKW, WDFW, DoW, and MBA all plan to continue to increase the availability of bear-resistant food storage and waste receptacles in 2021.
- Lori Roberts requested us to use the form on the IGBC website to report any brands/models/units that have problems. Form is under the tab on *Bear-resistant Containers*.

Objective #6 – Determine presence of salmon poisoning disease in fish and bears in NCE.

One hundred salmon samples collected from the Wenatchee and Methow Rivers, the two NCE rivers most likely to harbor SPD. Were analyzed at Southern Georgia University. Did not find SF agent, but sample size likely too small. Found antibodies, but need more research to say what this means.

Contracts are complete, but more work is needed. Agreed to encourage WSU to finish data analysis and publish results. Quote from WSU Dr. Robbins, “this is the least of your worries” regarding grizzly bear restoration in the NCE.

Goal 3 - Document presence of Grizzly Bears

Objective #1: Verify reports of grizzly bears as soon as practical.

- Reports of “large brown bears” and photos of brown-colored black bears received and evaluated. Many trail cameras out in the ecosystem with focus on other carnivores, but no grizzly bear detections.
- For 2021 we will continue to follow up on reports and trail cameras will continue to be deployed.

Defenders of Wildlife Presentation on recent document – Zoe Hanley

North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Coexistence and Core Habitat GIS Analysis

Defenders commissioned Collective Ecological Consulting to complete report, as presented at our June 2020 Spring meeting. An electronic version of the report was emailed to subcommittee members. Zoe briefly reviewed the contents of the report including “potential conflict zones” and the “core habitat analysis”. Most of presentation focused on “core habitat analysis”. The following are highlights. See the report for more details.

Determined the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem was most comparable to NCE.

Used 2500 acre minimum core area size (as does the NCDE).

Presented 4 different core area scenarios that differed on how non-motorized trails were treated and how Maintenance Level 1 roads were treated on the National Forests.

Stated that they hoped this product could be used by the agencies to help make future decisions on core area analysis, they were concerned that the no-net-loss of core area policy was not sufficient to meet grizzly bear recovery objectives, but they had no intention of using this report or its contents for litigation.

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Question: Core area has been defined by IGBC and your definition doesn't seem to be the same, could you use a different term rather than "core". Defenders may not intend to use this for litigation but other organizations may use it just for that. Answer: The different scenarios in the report are not meant to give different definitions but rather present different scenarios of how core area could be calculated.

Public Comments

- Graham Taylor, National Parks Conservation Association – Expressed appreciation for our work. NPCA is excited to work with the incoming Biden Administration to “pick up where we left off”. He noted disappointment in lack of a report on the 2nd round of public engagement that occurred for the NCE Grizzly Bear Restoration EIS. He acknowledged Jack Oelfke and thanked him for his years of leadership and dedication to grizzly bear conservation efforts.
- Rob Krehbiel, Defenders of Wildlife – Expressed thanks to all, especially to Jack Oelfke. Stated that Defenders were thrilled that the Biden/Harris ticket seems to be committed to science. Defenders goal is to have “bears on the ground” in the NCE before the end of Joe Biden’s first term. Robb summarized some of Defenders recent work with numerous groups in area including purchasing 39 bear-resistant trash containers for the Upper Methow effort, completing an e-fence project on Sauk Farm, and continuing to do outreaches and awareness trainings. As always, call if you need help with funding for dumpsters, food storage boxes, etc.
- Joe Scott, Conservation NW – Question: Is there a plan for a food storage order in backcountry areas of the National Forest. Answer: No, not at this time. Intend to get developed campgrounds up to speed with bear-resistant dumpsters and work with WDFW on identifying any specific problem areas prior to pursuing food storage orders in backcountry.

MANY THANKS TO JACK OELFKE.

CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES ON YOUR RETIREMENT.

YOU WILL BE MISSED

~ Meeting adjourned ~